

THE SECOND WOOING OF SALINA SUE.

BY RUTH MCENERY STUART.

IT all came about through the investigations of the Reverend Saul Sanders, of the Buckeye Conference. Other evangelists had come to the plantation and conducted revivals, adding to the church militant a goodly number of souls. Then things had gradually settled down in the old ruts. But with the advent of the good brother from the Buckeye Conference there began a new order of procedure.

Brother Saul was a man of power, with that magnetic quality that insures leadership, and his words were those that thunder. After proceeding along the old emotional lines until he had worked the people up to the highest pitch of religious enthusiasm, he calmly stepped down from the pulpit, and assuming the awful and solemn tones of the divinely commissioned, he delivered for their edification what he was pleased to call "a settin' fo' th' o' de 'mortal law, accordin' to de dispositions o' de Christian Chu'ch military." It would be vain to attempt to quote with effect from this discourse, which, as he himself freely claimed, "didn't confine itself to no one tex', bein' rich in textes taken berbatum, word for word, fom de Holy Scriptures."

The good people of Mount Zion Chapel had many times heard maledictions against the evil-doer hurled from its pulpit, and they were, moreover, familiar with some of the best-known scriptures bearing upon retributive justice as well as the communion of saints, and it was their wont to listen with becoming equanimity—the equanimity of the presumably innocent—to frequent allusions to such special numbers of the code as were most often ignored. Until the coming of the apostle Saul of the Buckeye, however, none had had the temerity to particularize as to personal infringement. But Saul was a man of prowess. His lips were strangers to fear; and the gospel, as he dared to expound it, was not only retrospective in its leadings, it was restitutional.

It is a hard word, restitution, and a troublous, and it fell like a bomb upon the hitherto peaceful bosom of the body social of the plantation. Not that its application was particularly widespread. But

there were cases, well-known cases whose comfort its enforcement would so palpably disturb, that more than two or three or even four persons in the congregation felt, from the time of this preaching, that they were the objects of special notice. Indeed, the turning of turbaned, befeathered, and even of bald heads in special directions was for a time so marked that the august brother felt it necessary to call them to order, which he did by an open rebuke to the effect that those brothers and sisters who found it amusing to turn their heads to find motes in their brothers' eyes would do well to keep their backs to the congregation to hide the beams in their own. From which it appears that Saul was a man of some humor.

But Saul's chief strength lay in his absolute fearlessness. When he had declared that appropriation of a neighbor's goods without consent was a breaking of the law for which no repentance would avail without restoration of the stolen property, he did not hesitate to shout, while he shot an accusing glance of fire at a chosen offender, "Yas, Brother Jones, I'm a-lookin' at you," or, "Sister Smith, I trus' you's a-listenin'."

This was hard to bear, but it was not the worst. The law of restitution is broad, and it reaches far.

It was not enough—so the man of God proceeded to expound the law—that such of God's people as should in future seek matrimony should find it only at the consecrated hand of the regularly ordained for the holy bestowal, but if some had, either through blindness or hardness of heart, already achieved it outside the fold, they must hasten to forswear the stolen blessing, and come humbly and penitently forward and receive it with the benediction of the Church. This they were exhorted to do, or to have their names dishonorably erased from the rolls of the sanctuary. And in this application of the ordinance Brother Saul had the temerity to particularize even to the calling of names, loudly challenging the persons indicated to produce certain non-existent documents, or else come under the ban.

This was the bomb whose bursting had caused consternation even to the remote corners of the bit of earth which felt the tremors of the explosion—and for good cause.

The conditions of restitution are nearly always difficult and embarrassing. Even in the lesser case of the stolen shirt, for instance, it was sometimes quite impossible—and for obvious reasons. But it was in its bearing upon the more vital issue that he who essayed its enforcement had need of much wisdom. To confirm at random all existing relations was not always consistent with the teachings of holy writ, even as "feebly interpreted" by the humble brother from the Buck-eye. Indeed, the simple law of restitution occasionally required the unequivocal undoing of such, and, in some difficult instances, a redoing under embarrassing protests from those most concerned. And again there were instances, simple enough in their outward seeming, that developed annoying features under pressure.

Such, for instance, was the well-known case of cross-eyed Steve and Salina Sue, two quiet and otherwise well-ordered folk who had been for many years in good and regular standing in both church and community, notwithstanding certain alleged early omissions.

Salina, the cook on the plantation, a portly black woman of forty or thereabouts, was mother to all the happy group of pickaninnies who tumbled over each other in the back yard, and Steve was their father. Salina as a cook was a genius—which is to say that she seemed to have somewhat the touch of the magician in the practice of the art which she loved. Steve was also endowed beyond the common, but his gift was chiefly for paternity. Indeed, his whole nature had developed for so long along fatherly lines that he seemed to have paternal relations toward all living things on the place. The sick calf realized in him a benefactor, and homeless dogs who chanced along were observed to lift their tails above the courage line as they looked into his face and followed him to troughs of refreshment.

He was a faithful drawer of water and hewer of timber for his much-demanding spouse, and from the arrival of his first-born until now he had been a walker by night and a rocker by day of his ever-increasing family.

But with it all he had been happy.

His little wizened face, kindly in its original mouldings, was in as broad a grin when he went to the well for water, carrying one of the twins astride each hip, while he balanced the pail upon his head, as it was during the long hot afternoons in summer while he rocked the cradle, or fanned the flies off the "teethers" asleep on the patch-work quilt spread for them on the ground under the mulberry-trees outside the kitchen door.

But of late—which is to say for several days before this narrative begins—the little man had worn an air of utter dejection. His old misfit clothes, which in former days had seemed to impart a spice of the grotesque to his otherwise appealing figure, were shown to be inadequate now. The grotesqueness had lain in his smile, and it was no more. The slope of his narrow shoulders was the slope of the forlorn. Even the little children saw that something was wrong, and followed him curiously with questioning glances as he crossed the yard, and in the evenings when he sat on the end of the porch opposite his spouse, at whose feet it had been his life habit to recline, the dog was seen to go from one to the other before he took sides finally by lying down at Steve's elbow.

Steve and I had been good friends from the first. I soon recognized in him a prodigal and unreckoning contributor of kindly energies on the place; and besides, he amused me. I think he amused me about equally in all three of his relations—father, husband, and servant. I believe I place them in their proper order. I smiled the first time I saw him—and his first words gave me a story and won me completely.

He was crossing the cow-lot, leading a calf to water. A fretting child toddled at his heels, and while he stooped to take him in his arms, another sprang to his shoulders, straddled his neck, and took the ride to the spring mounted in this way, while the little father, struggling with the reluctant calf, staggered beneath his load. He was laughing, though, when I overtook him, and seeing his face, I laughed too, as I said, jocosely, "Well, old fellow, I suppose you are a sort of factotum, aren't you?" To which he instantly replied, with an amused glance at the child on his arm: "Yas, sir, I s'pec' I is. I sho does tote 'em for a fac'." And I loved him from that minute. The name



"THE SICK CALF REALIZED IN HIM A BENEFACCTOR."

factotem was his from that day, and if he did not hesitate to interpret it for the benefit of his numerous family, I was pleased to have it so.

But something was wrong now. That was evident. We had realized the shadow for several days, but had not taken it seriously. The domestic landscape needs its clouds to give value to the blue, and there had always been hazy days in the mulberry shadows for little Steve; but the mists had risen in clearing showers. Even an occasional storm cloud that had been spent in the bursting had darkened an occasional day—only for the glorification of evening.

My wife and I usually selected such uncertain weather to hunt through our wardrobes, and we usually found something for Steve first. And so I had done to-day, with a polka tie and a silk hat as results. I had laid them on my bed and strolled out in the yard, intending to call the fellow in to get them when next I should see him, when, chancing to glance toward the wood-pile, I saw him drop limply down upon a heap of chips, burying his face

in his arms against a pile of logs. The soft rim of his hat hung over his sleeve, and his whole pose betokened utter woe. As I approached him he lifted his face, and I saw that he had been crying. His eyes were sunken and wet, and his cheeks besmeared with grime from his dusty shirt sleeves.

I sat down beside him on the log.

"Why, old fellow, what's the matter?" I began, somewhat playfully; but, seeing him quail, I instantly repented, and my next words were in quite another tone. "Never mind, old boy; tell me all about it." I laid my hand upon his arm as I spoke. This exhibition of sympathy was too much for him. He fell to sobbing.

"I-I-I-I don't know, boss," he began to stammer—"I-I-I don't know wha' to say to you, b-b-but I mought as well jes *out w'id it*. Hit's my ole 'oman—Saliny Sue." He fairly wailed as he spoke her name, giving me the key to his heart sorrow. "I-I-I don't know wha' she gwine do—she's so obstropulous an'—an'—an' fickle-minded. I can't keep up wid her."



"I SAW HIM DROP LIMPLY DOWN."

I was relieved. If this were all, the cloud would soon break—or pass.

"Why, if that's all," I laughed—"if that's all, don't worry; just tell me about it."

The little man wiped his eyes.

"Well, s-sir, hit's dis-a-way," he began—"hit's dis-a-way: Y-y-y-you know when me an' Saliny Sue, when we married, we—we—we didn't bother nobody about it. We—we—we jes married private, 'twix' ourselves, an'—an' settled down public, same as heap o' we plantation folks does. An' we been livin' man an' wife now since long fo' de s'render—an' dey ain't no yether 'oman to me in all de worl'; an' Saliny Sue she knows it; an' likewise, I'm jes as sho she loves me as good as I loves her. An' de chillen"—at this he was obliged to stop and sob his sorrow out a little—"an' de chillen—look like we 'ain't niver is knowed which loved 'em de best, her or me. I know I'm sof' on dem wha' favor her,

an' she's clair sp'iled dem three yaller-complected ones wha' got my favor. Dey niver was no mo' lovin'er couple on Gord's roun' worl' 'n wha' Saliny Sue an' me is; an' now look like—look like—"he was sobbing again—"look like to me, deze heah chu'ch folks mought find some'h'n better to do 'n to stir up fam'ly troubles." He drew his sleeve across his eyes and steadied his voice. "You see, dis heah preacher f'om de Buckeye—Brer Saul Sanders—he kin read. An' you know readin'—not sayin' nothin' agin it for sech as kin stan' it—hit clair sp'iles some niggers—jes nachelly turns dey heads. An'

dis heah book-reader an' Bible-twister seem like he ain't satisfied to preach 'ligion same as we-all been used to, callin' out mo'ners, an' scrupulatin' on divine grace, an' passin' roun' de hat, an' lettin' saved sinners fin' peace,—an'



"HE P'INT AT ME."



"EF SHE WAS TO STUDY ABOUT GITTIN' MARRIED, SHE'D MARRY SOMEBODY."

'tendin' to dey own private business. He ain't satisfied wid dat, but arter stirrin' up de folks tell he got half on de mo'ners' bench an' de yetther half shoutin', an' a few left-overs standin' roun' de chu'ch do's smokin' dese heah little paper-kivered ciggars, seem like dat ought to satisfy him—but it don't. Seem like he see a chance to make a little money by upsettin' things right an' lef', an' so he say dat everybody wha' been married accordin' to dey own private judgment is boun' to step out an' git married over agin in de presence o' de congergation, an' wid dat he p'int at me and start a-readin' out Scripture textes to prove it. An' dat's all de trouble. He's a marryin' 'em off at two dollars a couple cash, ef dey kin raise it, an' ef not, he's takin' it out in anything—from fryin'-size chickens to a split hoe handle. An' dem wha' refuse, he gwine turn out'n de chu'ch."

He wiped his face and began fanning himself with his hat; and as it seemed to me that the situation had resolved itself into a question of marriage-fee, I laughed a little as I said: "Well, Steve, I'm glad to know that's all. You and Salina shall

pay him in cash, and I won't charge it up to you. We'll consider that a little wedding-present." (His and Salina's wages were always much overdrawn.) "You and she can go quietly into church on Sunday and have the ceremony over, and be done with it; but I don't see why you—"

He was sobbing again, more than ever, and now he blubbered. "Da-da-dat what I say to Saliny Sae; b-b-but she—she—she say *she won't have me*."

"Not have you, boy? I don't understand." The little fellow was fully ten years my senior, but there was something so pathetically childlike in his grief that I unwittingly called him boy.

"Yas, sir," he blubbered; "dat what she say. Sh-sh-she say ef she was to study about *gittin' married*, she'd marry *sombody*—not a po' little cross-eyed, scrooched-up someth'n' 'nother like me. Yas, sir; dat wha' she say; an' she stickin' to it. Jes as soon as de preacher tol' her she was required to marry 'cordin' to de chu'ch, seem like she took 'n' took a distas'e to me. She al'ays is plagued me consider'ble about my cross-eyes. When

she'd put me to min' de chillen, she'd say Gord set my eyes dat-a-way 'caze I was intended to min' twins—keep my eye on bofe at oncet—an' all sech as dat. Saliny Sue alays was a mighty proud lady, an' I know it'd pleg her to walk up de island o' de chu'ch wid a little slope shouldered man no purtier 'n I is, an' my bow-legs too. So I tol' her ef it would ease her min' I'd git a pair o' loose breeches an' a long coat; but 'tain't no use, sh-sh-she won't lis'n to reason, no ways." He was crying again.

"Why, she doesn't mean it, Steve; she's only trying you," I urged, and, indeed, I felt sure that this was true, though I was angry enough with her for her folly.

"No, sir, she ain't," he wailed. "She ain't puttin' me to no tes; no, sir, she mean it. She's de high-mindedest 'oman I ever see, Saliny Sue is, an' dat's one thing I alays is praised her for—her proudness—an' now she practisin' it agin me.

"Dis ain't de fus' time dis subjec' is been brung up betwix' us; no, sir. Every now an' agin I'd sort o' hint roun' about she an' me gittin' married, outspoke, wid a preacher, an' she'd alays turn it off—say ef she ever took a notion to marry she'd git a man wid looks an' behavior, an' all sech as dat; but I never paid no 'tention in p'tic'lar. I 'lowed she was havin' her own fun out o' me; but now I see she mean it—my Gord, I see she mean it!

"An' not on'y dat. Hit's got out on me. An' one or two o' dese heah low-life niggers dat's a-spillin' for a better joke, dey threatenin' me to turn in an' co't her—an' dey ain't a bit too good to do it, nuther. You know Saliny Sue she's a mighty good-lookin' 'oman to have dat yardful o' chillen, let alone eve'ybody knowin' dat she's been fo'ordained to cook for de angels. She kin git any man she want. But dey's one thing I wants to state right now. I ain't, to say, built for wrastlin', but I'm a sho hand wid a slingshot, an' ef one o' dem dare devils tries to pass Saliny Sue's row o' hen-coops, you'll have me on trial for my life. An' dat's put down in de book o' Revelations—dat's my intention."

I talked with the little fellow for quite an hour, hoping to help him to a more optimistic view of the situation; but seeing that my words counted for little on this plane, I veered a bit.

"Well, I tell you what I should do," I said, finally. "If I were in your place, I should play the independent too. Tell her that you think maybe she's right, and that, when it comes to marrying, you can get lots of pretty young women—which, no doubt, you could," I added, mischievously.

"Oh, yas, sir," he interrupted—"yas, sir, I sho could say dat. No less 'n fo' peart-lookin' gals curtsied to me a Sunday, comin' out o' chu'ch—de same day de news got out on me—an' one gal—one gal, she even axed me is I choosed my company for de bobbeque yit—which I consider no less 'n a clair insult, an' she knowin' me an' all my family. Yas, sir."

It was hard for me to keep my countenance, the picture of the little fellow in the new rôle was so absurd.

"Well, and what did you say to her?" I asked.

And now, for the first time, he grinned.

"Oh, I didn't tell her nothin' in partic'lar. Of co'se I couldn't let her outdo me in manners, an' she a lady, an' so—an' so I jes curtsied back, mannerly, an' presented her wid de flower I had in my coat collar, an'—"

"And what were you doing with a flower in your coat collar, I'd like to know?" I laughed outright at this. But Steve was quite serious.

"Well, sir"—he spoke in an even voice—"I b'lieve in every man dressin' accordin' to his station. D'rec'y Saliny Sue united wid de preacher to declare dat I was a single man, I stepped out an' twis' off de bigges' chrysanthe'um on de yaller bush, an' I stuck it in my collar, an' walk out in her presence—yas, sir. Of co'se I was des a-devilin' 'er, an' it was my intention to present it to de lady o' my heart in de co'se o' de evenin'; but Saliny Sue she ac' so 'bove-ish an' biggoty dat, somehow, long as I been knowin' her, I didn't have de courage to walk up an' present her wid dat chrysanthe'um. So I lef' it in my collar jes for spite, and Saliny Sue she seen me when I give it to Nancy, too; an' I was glad of it—on'y she was so mad she whupped de baby, an' he not doin' a thing. Dat was de on'ies' thing I hated."

He stopped talking here for a while, and seemed to be reflecting. But presently, looking down at himself deprecatingly as he spoke, he said, slowly, "Of co'se, ef I'm boun' to do it, I'll start out an' cot'



J.B. FROST

"SHE EVEN AXED ME IN I CHOOSED MY COMPANY FOR DE BORBEUR."

'er agin, b-b-but look like I 'ain't got no fitten clo'es, sca'cely—all dem you gimme she knows by heart, an' dey party well wo'e out, anyhow. You 'ain't got nair ole pair o' white breeches, is you, marster—or maybe a pair wid a plaid pattern on em, please, sir? Lucy, our ol'es' gal, she's toler'ble handy wid her needle, an' she'll get 'er ma to show her how to cut 'em down for me. Saliny Sue she love to see a man in white—I often heerd 'er sesso—so ef you got air pair o' ducks—"

It seems to me yet, as I recall it, although it all happened many years ago, that I have never seen a more pathetic little figure than that of the diminutive rejected husband, Steve, during the fortnight following my interview with him on the wood-pile. Arrayed in second-hand clothes much too large for his slim

figure, although they were more or less "taken in" at some points by the dutiful daughter Lucy, and sometimes wearing a flower upon his breast, he might be seen at any time of the day crossing the yard in performance of some eager service to the lady of his life. Occasionally he carried a baby in his arms, but more often, in respect to his courting clothes, he led the little ones by the hand in these days. He was courting his old wife again with all the ardor that years of devotion had kept warm, and he brought to the task all the arts he knew. Indeed, he even summoned to his aid some that he did not know, and was constrained to borrow, as, for instance, the writing of numerous love-verses, for whose form the writer of this pitiful little comedy is responsible, and into which he tried to infuse a devotion so loyal and sincere as to dignify the novel service. Most of these "pomes" were casually brought into the body of certain prose effusions which he frankly called "love-letters," written up to the rhyming point literally by his own dictation, and, barring the fact that there should be in them no allusion to any family relations—he declared that she should be co'ted same as any fresh gal—he left me quite free. And as I knew that the little fourteen-year-old daughter, Lucy, would have to read them to her mother, I was always conscious of a certain educational responsibility in the matter. In the beginning of sorrows these missives came into being about every three or four days, but they soon repeated themselves daily. This is the way of the impetuous lover, it is true, and could hardly have obtained in the situation but for the tension of circumstances. Imminent loss is one of the surest magnifiers of values, glorifying the threatened possession even beyond its intrinsic merit sometimes, perhaps.

During this period of hopeful and timed probation the little husband saw the great wife-mother-woman of his life as an incarnation of blessedness. He was a mighty serious lover these days. And, for the first time in the history of his kindly life, he was oc-



A. B. T.

"IN RESPECT TO HIS COURTING CLOTHES."

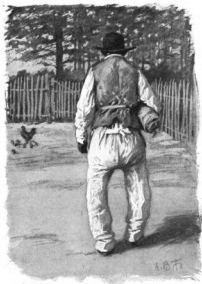


"WALK RIGHT IN AN' TECK OFF DEM BROGANS."

casionally a petulant father. Things were hard for him sometimes, as, for instance, when the twins sat and grinned at him when Salina ordered him to "walk right in an' teck off dem brogans," and he was constrained to obey in silence. It goes without saying that he had always obeyed her, but in the old days he had felt free to quarrel a little over it in manly fashion, as is a way with husbands who feel their dignity jeopardized. Of course, in the case of the shoes, he knew that she was right. It was foolish to be wearing out shoe leather on week-days. Besides, his earth-loving feet were punished in their imprisonment, and he was glad to have them free. This, however, did not mitigate his humiliation in the eyes of the children whom he had nurtured, and to see them gloating over it was more than he could stand; and it is said that in this interval he twice shook the twins until they whimpered, and that once when "the triplers" climbed to his shoulders he suddenly stood up, letting them fall as they might, remarking, as he walked off, "I ain't no stepladder."

But when they tumbled in a heap, bumped and bawling, he relented to the extent of playing horsy for them on all-fours all the forenoon.

Nearly three weeks passed without any apparent change in the situation, and the revival meetings were drawing to a close. Their probationary period of church membership was nearly over. Salina and Steve were still regular attendants at the evening meetings, but they sat in separate pews, and though both joined lustily in the singing of the hymns, their voices were as two. Steve had a voice that always stood alone in any ordinary congregation, no matter how many sang the same words to the same tune, and the result was that he seemed to lead the singing, which was far from the truth. Steve never led in anything in his life. The fact was that, as is often the case with small men, his voice, a high tenor, was much too large for his body, and when he sang with his might the veins in his high forehead stood out in knots, and his face bore the lines of physical pain, so that one seeing him, even though his



"IF STEVE ON'Y HAD A NOBLER SHAPE."

song were worthy, would be more apt to be sorry than glad when he sang.

Salina, in no wise a sensitive soul, had always taken great pride in his singing, and she had a way of throwing her velvety voice all around the sharp edges of it as they sang together, standing side by side in the church, filling the roof with a pleasing harmony, so that it was true, in a sense, that she and Steve together had for years led the singing. Perhaps she would have led it without him.

But now, in the very crisis of things, it irritated her to hear Steve's voice ring out clear and strong. It seemed to proclaim him superior to the situation, and this angered her. Nor was she one to decline a challenge. If Steve could sing, so could she—so did she. She sang for all she was worth—sang her best and loudest; but she sang away from Steve, no longer protecting, but betraying him by every artful turn of her flexible voice, which struck his angles at hurtful points. The singing was never at once so fine and

so poor in Mount Zion as now. And yet, although some felt it vaguely, no one could complain, for how could they understand?

The truth of the situation was this:

Steve knew that Salina had always liked his singing, and he sang to her—only to her—as truly as ever he had sang to his mate. But even Salina—not being a sensitive soul—could not know this. And yet she was sensitive to some things. For example, although Steve sat beyond the range of her vision in a side pew, she discerned his face with her mental eyes. It seemed always before her as he sang—strenuous, distorted, and, for the first time in their lives, defiant. She even knew the places in the up notes where his heels left the floor, and the long stretches where he clutched the back of the pew before him with his nervous little hands, and it gave her a savage pleasure to sail in, anticipating him disastrously in some of his reaches, or to lag behind, leaving his slender

thread notes bare, while she followed majestically, like Cleopatra in her barge.

This little comedy was enacted night after night during the three weeks' services—Steve singing for Salina, Salina singing against Steve—and inversely, as she won in the race, was she loser in popular sympathy. Indeed, everybody was on Steve's side from the first, and the few who, either for lack of interest or through discretion, had not expressed themselves hitherto, declared that when they heard Steve's pitiful "thrill notes," they were too mad to look at Sister Salina Sue.

There is no telling how long Salina's obduracy would have held out, or, indeed, how the story would have ended—though in the nature of things there seems but one natural conclusion—but for the fact that just at this time something happened.

Little Minervy, commonly known on the place as the "middle tripler," was one day sitting on the cane carrier, where she had climbed for a ride, and came so near being drawn to her death in the ma-

chinery of the sugar-mill that old shouting Sam, one of the chief dignitaries on the place, to save her life, thrust her off with a hoe-handle. In the fall her collar-bone was broken, and she was brought home for dead, followed by a procession of excited women and children.

When he heard the news, Steve forgot that he was a single man, and rushing into the cabin, he snatched up the child from Salina's lap and held her on his own, covering her with kisses and tears while restoratives were applied.

Steve was not seen to come out of the cabin when the crowd dispersed—and that is all that any one knows on the subject.

It was on the second morning after this casualty that Salina herself trudged up to the house and asked to see her mistress. As soon as my wife saw her she knew that the cloud had passed, for she bore herself with beaming complacency as, having curtsied at the door, she approached the empty rocker facing her mistress.

"Please, ma'am, ax me to set down," she began, with a glance at the chair. "I got a lot to talk about dis mornin'."

When she dropped into the chair she closed her eyes for a moment, swaying back and forth, as if to collect her thoughts.

"Well, honey," she said, presently, stopping the motion of her chair, "what kind o' bride you reckon I gwine be?" She chuckled merrily as she said it, but only for a second. "Sho 'nough, missy, I'm gwine git married, Steve an' me, an' I come a-beggin' dis mornin'—an' a-borry-in'. I al'ays is said dat ef I ever married, I'd marry in style, an' so I got to have a whole bride's outfit, fom de veil down, an' less'n you kin hunt me up some'n white to rig out in, I boun' to git a little mo' advance on my wages."

"Well, Salina, I'm glad to see that you have come to your senses." My wife, knowing the ways of the plantation—or rather knowing that there is no knowing them—expressed no surprise or amusement at the picture suggested, of fat old Salina in a bridal dress. We had known similar instances, differing only in circumstances, and it was the part of wisdom, as Steve's friend, to treat the matter delicately. And so, paying no heed to her allusion to her dress, she said again: "Yes, I'm glad you have come to your senses. I don't see how you hesitated."

"Well—of co'se—baby—it's too late to talk about it now," she faltered. "Hit's too late to talk about it now, but ef I'd 'a' knowed it'd come to dis, I'd 'a' picked out *somebody* whilst I was a-pickin'—but it's too late now. Ef I'd try to sen' Steve away now, look like de chillen 'd all turn on me—besides, Steve ain't to say well. He ain't fitten to turn out, a widdier-man or a bachelor, wid dat col' on his lungs. An' de preacher say dat ef I was to sen' 'im off, I couldn't pass for a widdier. He say I wouldn't be no mo'n a ole maid, w'ich, it seem to me, wid all dem chillen, would be a disgrace."

"But it's all settled now, an' we gwine be married nex' Saturday week. I had to put it off a week or so, so's me an' Lucy 'd have time to git our clo'es ready. I done took up de seams o' dem pants marster gin Steve; an' his christenin'-coat, I'll vinegar it over an' press it good; an' de



"HE SANG TO HER."

preacher he's got marryin' hat an' gloves to hire for ten cents, an' rings either to hire or sell. Steve done bought de ring, at fifteen cents a week foun now tell



"PO' LITTLE LUCY!"

Christmas. An' so de ole man he's fixed—but me an' Lucy, of co'se we mus' git our white frocks an' gloves, an'—"

"I'll attend to your dress, Salina," my wife said, rather resenting the double request, "but really I don't see why your daughter need have a white gown too."

"'Caze she gwine stan' bridesmaid, mistus—dat's de on'ies' reason. Yas'm, she gwine stan' up wid us, an' she's tickled all but to death over it. She's purty nigh fifteen, I s'pec', an' hit'll be jes de same as comin' out in s'ciety. Yas'm, she gwine be de bridesmaid, an' pull off my glove whilst her pa put de ring on my finger; an' hit'll be a mighty good an' 'ligious thing for her to remember in after-years—yas'm. 'Tain't every yo'ng gal dat kin ricollec' her pa an' ma gittin' married. Come to think it over, I s'pose I'll feel mo' cancelized in my min' when it's did an' over 'eordin' to de requiemints. Sev'al couples wha' been th'ough it say dey feels a heap mo' consolated in dey hearts.

"But, tell de trufe, missy, I'd give five

dollars—ef I had it—right now ef Steve on'y had a nobler shape an' some *git-up* to him, jes for de passage up de island o' de chu'ch. Hit's worse 'n a cake-walk, de way our folks passes remarks on bridal couples when dey step up in chu'ch. An' po' little Lucy she got her pa's build too; an' so Steve he say I sho is gwine be belle o' de weddin', ef I is gittin' ole an' got a yardful o' chillen.

"Po' little Steve! When it come to a 'oman passin' heart-jedgmint on a man, I b'lieve pitifulness pleads for him stronger'n good looks—yas'm. Des de glimsh o' Steve's little slope-shouldered back when he'd cross de yard deze las' two weeks, an' his little bow-legs in dem white breeches—dem inside starched seams al'ays tickles him tar'ble—I 'clare, some days when I'd look at him my heart would be so teched dat, 'cep'n' for de lump in my th'roat, I'd 'a' called him in an' eased his mind.

"Po' little Lucy! She had her hands full deze las' few weeks iron-in' her pa's co'tin' outfit; an' she deserve to stan' bridesmaid to compliment her for her trouble—yas, she do."

She leaned back in her chair and began rocking softly, and presently she said:

"All de chillen's in favor o' de weddin'—all dat kin talk, an' I mought as well say de rest too, 'caze de one wha' made up de riconcilemint she can't talk yit, on'y two or three words. But she knowed some'h'n was wrong, Minervy did—"

I had slipped into the room unobserved some moments before, and seeing her hesitate here, I said, "Go on, Salina, and tell us all about it."

"I 'clare, Marse Joe!" She was really embarrassed for a moment, seeing me there, but it passed quickly, and she turned to me as she went on: "Well, hit was dis-a-way, marster. You know de yether day, time Minervy got th'owed off de cane-carrier, of co'se we-all 'lowed she was kilt; an' quick as her daddy heerd tell of it he come a-runnin' in an' snatch her off my lap an' hol' her whilst we-all dowed her wid cold water, an' ole Aunt Mimie helped bring her th'ough wid mustard an' prayer; an' I naver said nothin', on'y set down on a stool by him an' moan in'ardly, tell d'rec'ly she opened her little eyes—you know Minervy she got deze heah

cunnin' little squirl cross-eyes, jes like her pa—an' dat teched me. But look like my heart was so hardened I couldn't say nothin', jes set still. But quick as she open her eyes an' see her pa, what you reckon she done, an' her little collar-bone all fractioned too? She lif' her little arm up an' put it roun' her pa's neck, an' den she re'ch over wid de yether an' pull my face down to him, an' hol' us tight jes so—"

She paused here and wiped her eyes.

"I tell you, marster an' mistus, ef little Minervy, ef she had a died an' lef' me uncanceled wid 'er pa, I naver would 'a' forgive myse'f on earth—never would. I'd 'a' took it for a heavenly vengeance on me—yas'm—yas, sir.

"But of co'se she see in a minute dat hit was all right 'twix' her pa an' me—de way we cried—an' she laugh a little weak laugh. For a while look like de whole yardful was cryin' under de mulberries—cryin', laughin', bofe togedder."

She wiped her eyes again, and said some really womanly things touching her life and its responsibilities—simple resolutions they were—wifely and maternal, which perhaps it were more delicate to pass over in this light telling of her story, lest it seem a betrayal. But we liked her better for it.

"Well, I mus' go," she said presently; "I mus' go to my cook-pots; an' I gwine leave de white frock an' de veil an' de wreath all to you, you say, missy? An' Lucy's frock too? Thanky, ma'am; thanky truly, ma'am. Lucy an' Steve will sho be proud when I tell 'em. But I does wish you could see Steve's face

dis mornin'. He got de dry grins so bad he's ashamed to come up to de house. You say whar is he? He out behin' de kitchen mindin' de chillen—"Nervy an' de twins. Look like de whole crowd's a waitin' on 'im.

"De fust thing I done when we got engaged over agin was to meek him go in an' teck off dem duck breeches an' put on some woollen clo'es. I b'lieve he's sneezed mo' sence he's started a co'tin' 'n he's sneezed all his life. A co'tin' man 'ain't got a bit o' sense. Well, I mus' go—an' don't forgit de orange-flower wreath, mistus, an'— What dat you say? Yas, I know we mought git fresh flowers off de trees now, but—but—but dey'd look mighty cheap, seem like. Hunt me up some real superficial rag flowers, please, ma'am. An' I'll be glad when it's all over. But after waitin' so long, for Gord sake, lemme git married right. I don't teck much stock in marryin', nohow.

"I wouldn't min' totin' a big bo'quet o' orange blossoms in my hand ef you sesso—wid a white ribben on 'em—jes as you say. We gwine leave it all to you, missy, an' marster. Well, I'm gone. So long."

She had started out, and when she got to the door she burst out laughing.

"For Gord sake, missy," she chuckled, "come heah an' look at Steve; jes look at him settin' in de baby's ca'age, an' de whole crowd harnessed up draggin' him round de yard—an' he grinnin' like a chessy cat. He sho is earned dat one ride.

"How could I ever thought about sendin' 'im off?"

